



United States Department of the Interior
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

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To: State and Center Directors

From: Assistant Director, Fire and Aviation

Subject: Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Guidance for the Department of the Interior (DOI) Medical Standards Program (MSP) Process for Fiscal Year (FY) 2017

Program Area: Fire and Aviation Management

Purpose: This instruction memorandum (IM) provides BLM-specific direction for employee participation in the DOI MSP process for FY 2017. Participation is required as a condition of hire and continued employment for firefighting positions requiring arduous duty and prior to participating in the arduous work capacity test (WCT).

The DOI, using the services of Comprehensive Health Services Inc. (CHS), implemented Phase I (Nevada, Oregon, and Washington) in 2015. Phase II was implemented in 2016 and encompassed Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho and Montana. Phase III will begin in 2017 and includes New Mexico, Wyoming, Utah, and all arduous duty individuals in Wisconsin, Oklahoma, Texas, Virginia and Washington DC. Phase III will also include implementation of all administratively determined/emergency firefighters (AD/EFF), except in Alaska and Team Rubicon individuals. Alaska and Team Rubicon AD/EFFs will be implemented in Phase IV in 2018.

This IM augments BLM policy direction for the WCT found in the 2016 *Interagency Standards for Fire and Fire Aviation Operations*, chapters 2 and 13.

Policy/Action: All employees, regardless of employment status, including administratively determined or emergency firefighters (except AD/EFFs in Alaska and Team Rubicon), who participate in arduous duty wildland fire activities are required to complete an exam every three years and receive a qualification determination under the Federal Interagency Wildland

Firefighter Medical Standards. In the years between these periodic exams, an employee will self-certify.

Medical Program Participants:

- All permanent employees who have not had an exam in the past three calendar years (on or after January 1, 2013)
- All new permanent employees (permanent full time, career seasonal, term Pathways interns)
- Administratively determined/emergency firefighters (AD/EFF), EXCEPT those in Alaska and Team Rubicon
- All temporary employees

Phase I and II (Nevada, Oregon/Washington, Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Montana)

All arduous duty personnel who completed an exam in 2015 and 2016 through CHS and received a Medically Qualified determination; or a Qualified with Risk Mitigation waiver from their agency must complete the DOI MSP Self-Certification Process prior to taking the WCT in 2017. The self-certification process will be available through the CHS Employee Access System (EAS) beginning **9/30/2016**.

Any new arduous duty employees that did not participate in the initial exam process are required to complete a medical exam through CHS and medically qualify under the Federal Interagency Wildland Firefighter Medical Standards.

By default, those due for self-certification and the Client Access System (CAS) user who originally requested the employee's exam will be notified at 60, 30 and 15 days prior to the previous year's date of the last exam. Results of completed self-certifications will be printable through EAS and should be used as verification of medical qualification at the WCT. Self-certification results will also be viewable by management in CAS.

Phase III Implementation (New Mexico, Wyoming, Utah and all individuals in Wisconsin, Oklahoma, Texas, Virginia, Washington D.C. and remaining units who did not phase in during Phase I and II AND all AD/EFFs EXCEPT in Alaska and Team Rubicon)

All arduous wildland firefighters in the Phase III Implementation Group are required to complete a medical exam through CHS and medically qualify under the Federal Interagency Wildland Firefighter Medical Standards as an applicant.

Alaska AD/EFF and Team Rubicon Personnel

The DOI MSP and BLM are committed to establishing the proper foundation for successful implementation of medical exams using the DOI MSP process for administratively determined/emergency firefighters in Alaska and participants on Team Rubicon. As such, Alaska and Team Rubicon AD/EFFs will be included in Phase IV of the program in FY 2018 rather than in Phase III. This change will allow the DOI MSP to ensure successful implementation in Alaska.

The safety and health of AD/EFFs in Alaska and Team Rubicon remains a priority; until Phase IV implementation occurs, all Alaska and Team Rubicon AD/EFF firefighters will fill out the health screening questionnaire (HSQ). If they answer yes to any questions on the HSQ, they must then have the DOI MSP medical exam packet completed by a medical professional.

Non-Qualification Process for All Phases

If an individual receives a determination of “Not Qualified”, the servicing human resources office (SHRO) will initiate the Risk Mitigation/Waiver (RM/W) process.

As an alternative, employees may also submit further medical information for reviewing medical officer (RMO) review at any time by contacting DOI MSP Customer Service.

Risk Mitigation/Waiver Process

For 2017, the RM/W review process has changed to improve the timelines for final review and management official approval. The Fire Operations Group (FOG) representative for each state will be responsible for reviewing and providing recommendations on all proposed RM/W where the non-qualifying health condition is static and stable. Review of all RM/W for non-qualifying health conditions that are NOT static and stable will be reviewed at the national level by the Wildland Fire Safety Program Manager (WFSPM), Shelby Gales. The WFSPM will also be responsible for second-level reviews during DOI medical review boards.

To provide support to the states in the RM/W process, there will be added emphasis on determining whether an individual with a non-qualifying health condition is medically static and stable to assist with consideration of risk mitigation waivers. Beginning in Phase III, non-qualification letters will include: 1) the standard not met resulting in the non-qualification decision; 2) whether the non-qualifying health condition is static and stable; and 3) if possible, recommendation on potential risk mitigations. The firefighter will be provided 10-days (if needed) during review of their exam to submit additional information that demonstrates that the non-qualifying health condition is static and stable. The agency or firefighter may also submit additional information for medical consult through the DOI MSP to determine whether they are static and stable with a non-qualifying condition. For changes in short-term health conditions (i.e. minor surgeries, completion of medications, improved BP, etc.) where additional information could bring the firefighter back within standard, the DOI MSP RMO review function remains the same.

The RM/W process is available for applicants not meeting one or more of the Federal Interagency Wildland Firefighter Medical Standards. Existing waivers or waivers with restrictions remain valid unless there is a change in medical condition. For detailed information on the DOI MSP and the RM/W process guidance, please visit

http://www.nifc.gov/medical_standards

Reviewing Medical Officer (RMO) Review and Medical Consults

Reviewing medical officer reviews are generally for firefighters that have short term conditions and can provide information from their primary physician/specialist that clearly shows the condition has been resolved and the firefighter is able to resume arduous duty without limitations. An RMO review may also be requested through the DOI MSP if the fire management officer (FMO) or SHRO has concerns about a

clinician's performance of the DOI MSP exam. All exams are subject to medical review by the DOI MSP, which could potentially change the examinee's clearance.

Exam Payment

All exams under the phased implementation process with CHS are centrally-funded at the national level. Firefighters should not pay for or be billed for CHS exams.

For Alaska and Team Rubicon AD/EFFs in need of an exam, the preferred method for obtaining medical exam services is through the utilization of local unit blanket purchase agreements (BPA) with local medical clinics. If this is not an option, other payment methods may be established by the local unit. Non-CHS exam costs will be paid for by Fire and Aviation using the following code:

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Additional medical tests not required by the standard DOI MSP medical exam are not authorized. If the examining clinician recommends further tests to determine firefighter medical clearance, prior approval by the SHRO/FMO is required.

Additional testing or treatment requested by the employee/applicant shall be at their own expense.

Timeframe: Effective immediately.

Budget Impact: There is no direct financial impact to states/centers/units. Costs of exams are centrally funded at the national level.

Background: Agency administrators and supervisors are responsible for the occupational health and safety of their employees performing wildland fire activities, and may require employees to take a medical examination at any time. Established medical qualification programs, as stated in 5 Code of Federal Regulation 39, provide consistent medical standards in order to safeguard the health of employees whose work may subject them or others to significant health and safety risks due to occupational or environmental exposure or demand.

Manual/Handbook Sections Affected: *Interagency Standards for Fire and Fire Aviation Operations*, chapters 2 and 13.

Coordination: This IM has been coordinated with the Fire and Aviation Division of Fire Operations, the National Fire Safety Program Manager, the Fire and Aviation Human Resources Officer and the Fire and Aviation Equal Employment Opportunity Manager.

Contact: Specific exam questions should be routed to the DOI MSP customer service representatives, 1-888-286-2521, or wlfcsr@blm.gov.

Other program questions should be sent to Shelby Gales, BLM Fire Safety Program Manager, 208-387-5175, sgales@blm.gov.

Human resources or SHRO questions should be sent to the Fire and Aviation Human Resources Branch Chief, 208-387-5523.

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